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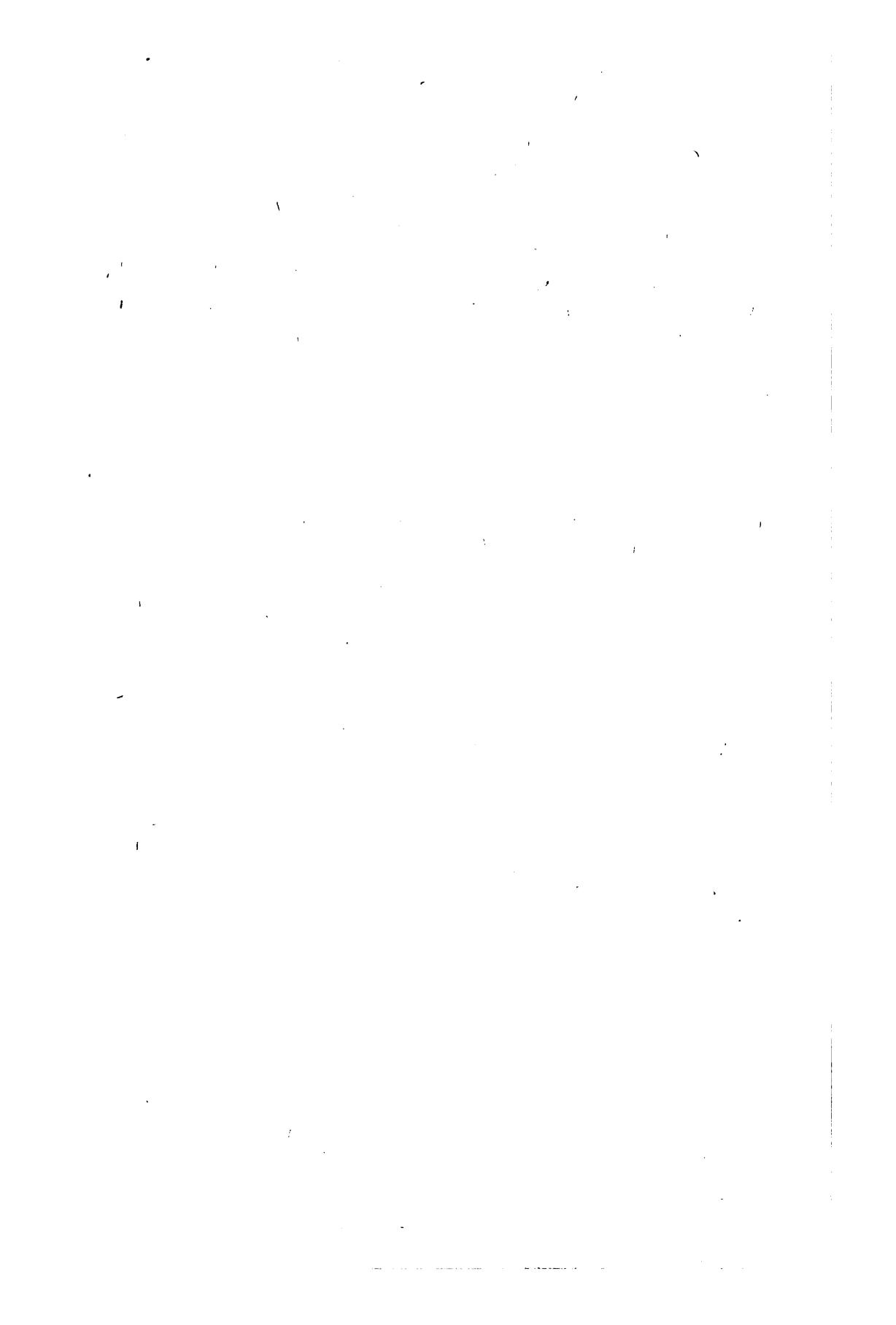


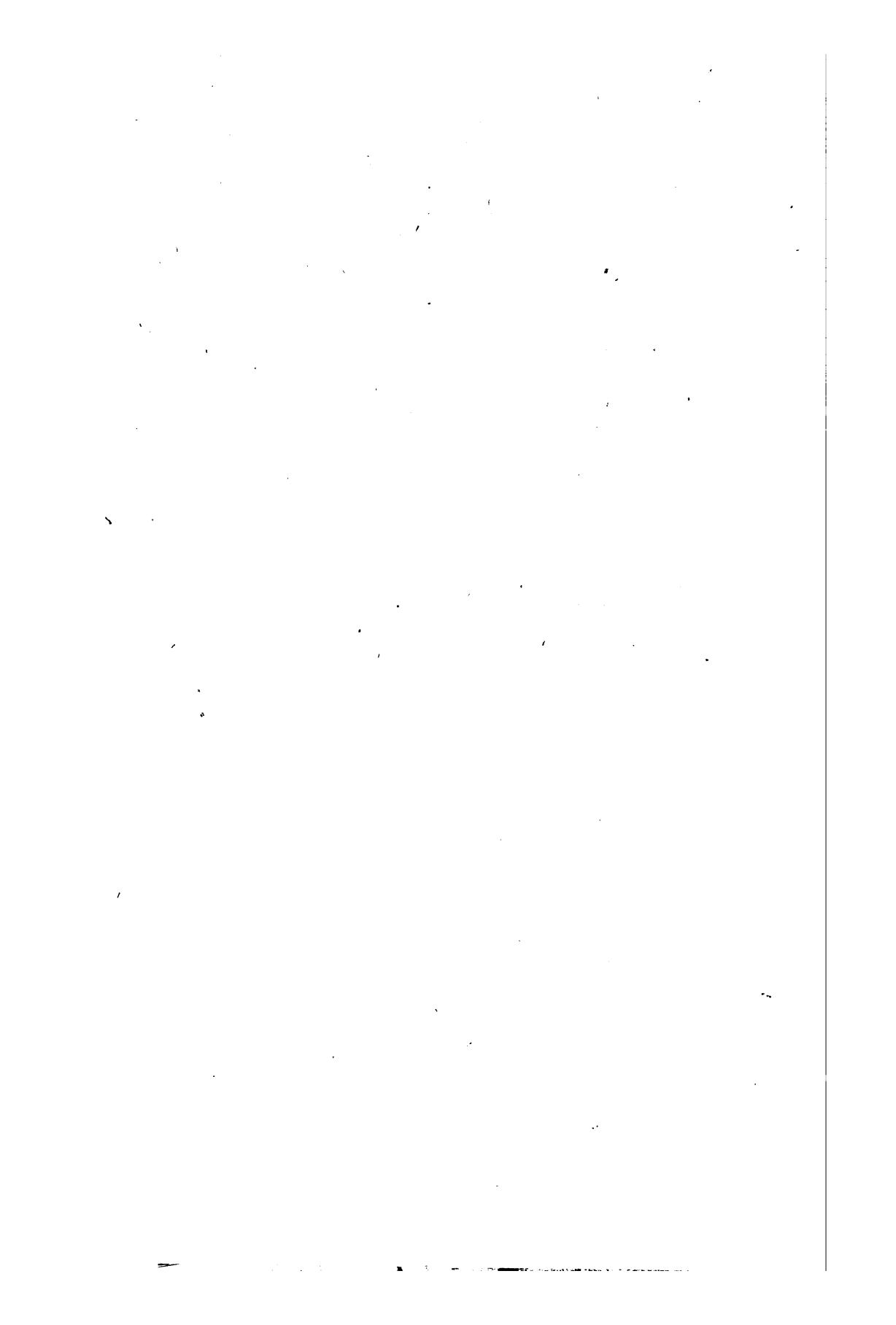
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# PAGES OF HISTORY

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## STATEMENT

OF Ferdinand  
MARSHAL FOCH

IN REGARD TO THE ARMISTICE AND  
THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

(From *Le Matin*, November 8, 1920)



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## PAGES OF HISTORY.

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### MARSHAL FOCH RECOUNTS THE ARMISTICE AND JUDGES THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES.

[From *Le Matin*, Nov. 8, 1920.]

Marshal Foch was at Amiens yesterday, where he paid homage to the brave Australian divisions that defended the city for three years and saved it in 1918. From Paris to Amiens in his parlor car—the same in which he received Erzberger the 11th of November of the glorious year [1918]—he has given to me his souvenirs of the great war and of the mediocre peace.

I avow here that as often as I have talked with Marshal Foch I have never seen him without feeling a profound emotion composed of admiration and respect without bounds. I can not hear without being moved the least speech from this mouth which has pronounced the most definitive phrases of history, and however banal may be the thought presented to my mind when I talk with him I shall repeat it, because it seems to me that we sometimes forget that: "This man has taken the allied armies in hand in full retreat, and eight months after has brought to the Entente Governments an armistice which signified the absolute capitulation of our hereditary enemy." Marshal Foch is a stranger to eloquent (or oratorical) effects. He pronounces his judgments with absolute simplicity in words of ordinary use. He said to me yesterday: "I am a man who says and does only obvious things. You see there is nothing superior to common sense." And when one hints that faith and genius add much to this quality, he smiles and seems incredulous as to the application to himself.

Recently there have been published some narratives, well documented, upon the days preceding the armistice. These publications, substantially exact, have one error; that is presenting the work of Marshal Foch in a fragmentary and incomplete form. One can judge of what Marshal Foch has done up to the armistice only when one knows what he has thought since the armistice.

"What is an armistice?" Marshal Foch asked me. "An armistice is a suspension of arms, a cessation of hostilities for the purpose of discussing peace, of putting the governments who have consented to it in a position that they can impose the terms upon which they shall determine.

"Has the armistice that I have signed fulfilled this object? Yes, when on the 28th of June, after several months of negotiations, Germany accepted all the conditions of the Allies. I said to the president of the council, M. Clemenceau: 'Here is my armistice; you can now make any kind of a peace you like. I am in a position to enforce it.' If the peace has not been good, is it my fault? I have done my work, it remained to the politicians and government chiefs to do theirs.

"I thought for a long time about the peace. I wrote to M. Clemenceau as early as September, 1918. I said to him 'the end of the war approaches. Send me an official of the foreign office to inform me of the peace conditions which you prepare, so that our armies may occupy the regions which may serve as guaranties for the execution of the treaty which you will make.'"

M. Clemenceau replied: "That is not your business."

I must here enter a parenthesis. When Marshal Foch recounts that M. Clemenceau or another has treated him cavalierly or has vulgarly opposed him in certain circumstances, he exhibits no acrimony. He has a pleasant smile and generally he chooses this moment for lighting his pipe, grumbling "Yes, yes, truly," as if this were a picturesque detail, incapable of causing the least emotion.

"You are," I said to the marshal, "in the same carriage in which you received M. Erzberger and the other German plenipotentiaries of the 8th of November. What moment in these interviews have you been happy and moved?"

"You wish that I retell the armistice?" the marshal asked, "but, no, we have already spoken of that."

"That is possible, but you are the only one who has the right to retell it."

"Well, I will say to you that when I saw Erzberger and the two others accompanied by a marine officer whose name I completely forgot, I have had a momentary emotion. I said to myself, 'Here comes the German Empire. I must treat it as it deserves. It is beaten, I will be cold and firm; but without bitterness or brutality.'"

"Finally," adds the marshal in a low voice, confidentially to his pipe, "they were truly thoroughly beaten."

"I arrived at 6 o'clock in the evening at Rethondes, where my train was held upon a switch. The next day a train drew in slowly, pushed from behind. This was the German train. Because of the mud, the trains were connected by a bridge. A moment later Weygand enters and announces that the German plenipotentiaries have arrived. Erzberger first advanced and in an indistinct voice presented the others. One translated. I said to them: 'Messieurs, have you credentials? We will examine them.' They showed me some papers signed by Max of Baden. We judged them satisfactory. I turned to Erzberger and said to him: 'What do you desire?' 'We are come,' he replied, 'to receive communication of the conditions upon which you will make an armistice.'

"I replied: 'I have no communication to make to you. If you have a request to present to me, please do it.' And he gave new explanations. I said to him: 'Do you ask for an armistice?' 'We ask it,' he replied. I replied to him: 'I will therefore make known to you by my intermediary the conditions upon which the allied Governments consent to accord an armistice to you.' We sat in the adjoining car, which contained my bureaux. Admiral Wemyss at my right, Weygand at my left, Erzberger opposite to me, framed by Obendorf and Winterfeldt. Weygand read the conditions to them, which were translated to them as the reading proceeded. I saw them collapse. Winterfeldt was very pale. I believe, indeed, that he wept. I added at the conclusion of the reading: 'Messieurs, I leave you this text; you have 72 hours in which to reply. You can then present your observations in detail.'

Then Erzberger becomes pathetic. "For mercy's sake," said he to me, "M. Marshal, do not wait 72 hours. Stop hostilities at once. Our armies are prey to anarchy; menaced by bolshevism; this bolshevism can gain Germany, all of Central Europe, and menace France itself."

I bunched not and replied to him: "I do not know what state your armies are in; I know only the situation of mine. Not only I can not stop the offensive, but I give orders to pursue with redoubled energy."

Then Winterfeldt spoke. He had some carefully prepared notes.

"It is necessary," said he to me, "that our chiefs of staff meet and discuss together the details of execution. How can they do it? How can they communicate if hostilities continue? I ask for these technical reasons that hostilities cease."

I replied: "Opportunity for these technical discussions will be allowed in the 72 hours. From now, the offensive will be continued." They retired. As to myself, I addressed an order to all the Allied Armies, a last appeal to their valor and energy. Every commandant made an enthusiastic response: "Count upon us, we will go on."

I pass over the three following days. The Germans tried to submerge us with papers, Weygand received them and transmitted them to me.

And here the Marshal, with a smile of benevolence and understanding, interrupted his narrative, to speak of his collaborators: "They are," he said to me, "knowing chaps. They know their business, and when one has spoken of sending Weygand to Poland, some one says, 'he has had no experience as chief.' I simply replied, 'Do not disturb yourself, he will know what to do.'

The evening of the 10th, I reminded the Germans that they must sign on the morrow. They receive a long despatch from Hindenburg, telling them to sign, but the revolution broke out in Berlin, and I said to them, "Whom do you now represent?" They showed me a telegram from President Ebert, a telegram in cipher, signed I know not why, "606." This telegram confirmed their powers.

The night of the 10th to the 11th, I slept little. I slept from 12 to 1, then the Germans appeared. I conceded to them 5,000 "mitrailleuses" (machine guns), and some motor lorries. This was all. At 5 o'clock and 15 minutes, they signed in bold signatures. At 7 o'clock I left for Paris.

At 9 o'clock I was at Clemenceau's house. He was not particularly amiable. He grumbled, he demanded what I had conceded to the Germans—this had no importance \* \* \*. I told him that the cannon should be fired at 11 o'clock to announce the end of hostilities. He wished to have it at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, at the moment he mounted the tribune of the chamber. I said to him that the Allied Armies were upon the alert since the night by my order, and that at 11 o'clock the cannon would announce to the world the end of hostilities. I was supported in this by M. Barthou, M. Nail, and others. He then consented to firing the cannon at 11 o'clock. I said to him, "My job is over; yours begins."

"Was your task really terminated? After conquering Germany, was it not your duty to give counsel for the peace?"

"I do not know," he replied, "whether it was my duty, or rather, I believe it was, for I have well understood it, but I hardly had the right."

"I saw M. Clemenceau several times and have given him three written memoranda. But let me tell you the end which will explain the beginning. The proposed peace—I spoke to you about it at the time—seemed to me bad. I summed it up thus: Neither frontiers nor guaranties.

"For the security of France, the Rhine frontier was necessary; military frontier, mind you, not a political frontier. For the reparations due to France, I demanded the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine until the treaty was integrally executed, because, in my opinion, this was the only means of obtaining reparations.

"During the month of April, the 7th, I believe, I obtained a hearing by the Council of Ministers. I had vainly demanded to be heard by the French delegation. I had been refused. I remember the Council of Ministers. I came there with MM. Jules Cambon and Tardieu. I first asked that records be kept. It appeared that this was not customary. Then, as I had committed my observations to writing, I handed a copy to each Minister. Then I developed my theme orally. 'No guaranties, no security.'

M. Poincaré alone supported my views. After which we were asked to retire. On the way out, I said to M. Tardieu, in the presence of M. Jules Cambon: "There will perhaps come some day a High Court to pass judgment upon us, because France will never understand why out of victory we have brought failure. On that day I wish to present myself with a clear conscience and with my papers in form."

I made another attempt at the plenary session of May 6, when the treaty which had been completed the night before was submitted to the allied powers. The Portuguese—I know not who else—protested. Then I rose and developed my thesis once more. I was listened to in silence and the sitting closed. As tea was being taken in an adjoining room, I went to M. Clemenceau and said: "I had the honor of putting a question to you, and I should like an answer."

Then I saw him talk animatedly for a minute or two with Mr. Wilson and Lloyd-George. He returned to me and said to me: "Our answer is that there is no answer." I replied: "M. le Président, I have now to ask myself if I shall be able to accompany you to Versailles to-morrow. I am faced with as grave a problem for my conscience as ever I have known in my life. I repudiate this treaty, and I wish not by sitting at your side to share your responsibility for it." He was displeased and begged me to come. That evening he sent M. Jean Dupuy to me, who talked to me at length with great feeling. "Thus," I said to myself, "the allied Governments are going before the Germans to impose the treaty upon them. Is it possible that they present themselves without their armies, without the chief of their armies? I have not the right to stay out. This would be to weaken them before the enemy."

At Versailles, I found myself next to M. Klotz. When the ceremony of presenting the treaty was over, I said to him: "Monsieur, the Minister of Finance of the Republic of France, with such a treaty as this, you will go to the counters of the German Empire, you will be paid all right in monkey's money."

M. Klotz answered me sharply: "It is not one of my habits to be imposed upon." I said, "It is a habit you will acquire."

"And these," concluded the Marshal, "were the gentlemen to whom I had said: Make the peace you desire, I will charge myself with executing it."

I then ventured to ask him; "It seems that the chief of the French Government hardly sinned through excess of gratitude to you."

"What will you," he replied to me philosophically, "I do not know, if he liked me, but if he did he was not very demonstrative about it. I recall a council of war held at London on the 14th of March, 1918. I had been appointed Commander in Chief of the Army of Manoeuvre, which had only a slender existence. At this council, I asked the English to collaborate with some forces in the formation of this Army."

Marshal Haig, in the name of the English Government, which was represented by Lloyd-George, declared to me that this was impossible. I wished to make a warm reply when M. Clemenceau interposed vigorously saying: "Be silent, I am the one to speak for the Government of France and I declare that I accept Marshal Haig's statement."

Here the Marshal smiled and seemed not to have bitterness about this violent incident. He continued: "I said to myself, 'Wait until to-morrow when I will speak.' And the morrow when the council was about to break up, I began to speak, and this time no one stopped me. I declared that a redoubtable offensive was being prepared." I added: "I know the battles of the Allied Armies. I have participated in them upon the Marne and in Italy." I told them what liaisons should be made what understandings should be made, what precautions should be taken, etc., I declare to you that no preparations have been made to resist the offensive and this must produce disaster.

"They were somewhat moved," concluded the Marshal. "And some days after at Compiègne, then at Doullens, they remembered me. At Doullens, there were Lord Milner, Marshal Haig, M. Poincaré, M. Clemenceau, and Gen. Petain. From all this, I learned afterward that Gen. Petain was on the point of retreating toward Paris, and Gen. Haig to the Sea. This was opening the door to the Germans, and spelled defeat.

"Gen. Haig, sustained by Lord Milner, said that there must be a supreme chief and unity of command. I was proposed. 'We might,' says M. Clemenceau give Marshal Foch the command of the armies operating around Amiens. Marshal Haig opposed this and declared there was only one solution, this was to give me the command of the Allied Armies upon the western front. M. Clemenceau yielded and this was decided. At the luncheon which followed, M. Clemenceau said to me: 'Well, you have now got what you wanted.' I lost my temper a little, and answered: 'What, Monsieur le President! You give me a lost battle, and ask me to regain it? I accept, and you declare that you are making me a present? It requires all my open-heartedness to accept in such conditions."

"All my open-heartedness!!" This exactly describes Marshal Foch.

Some months ago, at San Remo, he talked with me. I did not believe the moment then suitable for publishing what he said. To-day, I feel it an imperious duty. Open-heartedness with him is the

disinterestedness of a man who has had only one passion all his life: France. To hear him speak makes distasteful the quarrels of politicians who have only one idea—to exalt themselves and diminish others.

But the tower of the Cathedral of Amiens appears in the horizon. The Germans in the tragic offensive of March, 1918, arrived at Villers-Bretonneux. If they stayed there, Amiens would have the fate of Rheims, and if they passed beyond it, France was beaten.

Then appeared upon the quay the gallant Australians with their high cloth hats. These men came from the Antipodes to leave 50,000 of their dead upon French soil, actuated by a sublime inspiration that no calculation or politics will ever explain. They know who won the war, and I myself think in looking at them that they are worthy of acclaiming Marshal Foch.

JULES SAUERWEIN.



